

Dear Mr. Carruth

Thank you for your presentation before the Mississippi River Commission during the public meeting held in Memphis, Tennessee, on August 20, 2001. In your statement you commented on the Grand Prairie Area Demonstration project and the potential White River Navigation project.

The Corps of Engineers has worked with the State of Arkansas, the local citizens represented by a locally elected irrigation board, and other interested parties for many years to identify a solution to the problems in the Grand Prairie region. Many alternatives have been considered over the years, and the optimum solution was found to be a combination of efficiency measures, additional water storage, environmental features, and an import water system to maintain irrigated agriculture in the project area. All analyses indicate that the project will accomplish its purpose of providing enough water to reduce the use of the alluvial aquifer to a sustainable amount and reserve the use of the Sparta aquifer for drinking water and industry.

The Corps has met all pre-construction National Environmental Policy Act requirements, including completion of public review of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and signing of the Record of Decision. This EIS was first released to the public in draft form, along with the project report, in August 1998, and a public meeting was held in Stuttgart, Arkansas, on September 15, 1998. The final report and EIS were released in December 1999. The EIS found that the project had no significant negative environmental impacts. These findings

were the result of studies conducted by or with the participation of several environmental agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, and Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission. Studies included assessments of project impacts to the fisheries and wetlands along the White River. The study reports are available to the public for review. The Environmental Protection Agency had no comments on the final EIS. The findings of the EIS were not challenged by any agency under the normal environmental review process. The project is currently under construction with over \$35 million in on-farm storage and efficiency features to be under contract by the first of October.

As you are well aware, an additional review of the water sources was completed and a recommendation to proceed with the project, as designed, was made by an oversight committee appointed by the Governor of Arkansas' Task Force on Water Resources. You and others, including representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nature Conservancy, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Arkansas State Geologist, U.S. Geological Survey, and Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission, participated in the review and voted to proceed with the project, as designed. Governor Mike Huckabee endorsed the findings of the oversight committee and urged rapid construction of the project in a letter dated March 6, 2001, to the Memphis District.

The Commission understands that you have stated you would oppose the project as long as any water from the White River is used. However, specific studies were performed to address the impacts to fisheries in the White River for the Grand Prairie project. These studies examined the impacts to larval fish and the connectivity of oxbows to the river. The fisheries impacts were found to be insignificant.

The Memphis District staff is currently reviewing the Pennington Report and how it relates to the proposed dikes on the White River. Once this review is complete, a member of the Memphis District staff will contact you. Full disclosure of the proposed project's benefits and impacts will be available when the draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for

the White River Navigation project is coordinated for public review and comment. This is currently scheduled for June 2002, subject to funding being made available in Fiscal Year 2002. The Memphis District will include you on the mailing list for the SEIS.

Thank you again for your presentation. The Commission appreciates receiving your comments and will be pleased to hear from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Edwin J. Arnold, Jr.
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
President Designee, Mississippi
River Commission